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ABSTRACT

The extent to which school mix--the social class composition of schools--influences school processes and student achievement has long been a matter of dispute. Drawing on a comparative ethnography of four New Zealand urban secondary schools, this article suggests that school mix probably does impact on school organizational and management processes so as to drag down the academic effectiveness of schools in low socioeconomic settings and boost effectiveness in middle class settings. The four schools represent a range of socioeconomic status populations, with varying proportions of White, Maori, and Pacific Islander students. Evidence of the influence of school mix on daily routines, curriculum management, and guidance and discipline matters is discussed. The article provides a framework for explaining why school mix might influence school organization and management, and it suggests implications for educational markets, school self-management, and school evaluation. (Contains three tables.) (Author/SLD)

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The Art of the Possible: Organising and Managing High and Low Socio-Economic Schools.

Martin Thrupp

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The Art of the Possible: Organising and Managing High and Low Socio-Economic Schools.

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A paper presented to the symposium 'Seven years on: School-site management in Aotearoa/New Zealand', AERA Annual Meeting, Chicago, 24-28 March, 1997

Abstract

The extent to which school mix - the social class composition of schools - influences school processes and student achievement has long been a matter of dispute. Drawing on a comparative ethnography of four New Zealand secondary schools, this article suggests that school mix probably does impact on school organisational and management processes so as to drag down the academic effectiveness of schools in low socio-economic settings and boost effectiveness in middle class settings. Evidence of daily routines, curriculum management and guidance and discipline matters being influenced by school mix is discussed. The article provides a framework for explaining why school mix might influence school organisation and management and suggests implications for educational markets, school self-management and school evaluation.

Introduction

A central tenet of 'New Right' school reform is that highly effective policies and practices should be possible in any school irrespective of the socio-economic (SES) composition of its student intake. This belief allows neo-liberals to assert that any well-managed school should be able to prosper in the educational marketplace and allows neo-conservatives to insist that schools be reviewed against common yardsticks of nation inspection or testing. But the Right has not itself manufactured this conviction: it runs deep within liberal educational thought. For instance the idea that good teaching can make a difference has long been a feature of teacher ideologies. As well, school reform writers - those in the school effectiveness, school improvement and school leadership fields - often argue that 'disadvantaged' schools can and must be turned around: indeed some see reference to student intake characteristics as an excuse for apathy.[1]

Given this, it would be easy to conclude that the central finding of Coleman and Jencks (Coleman *et al.* 1966, Jencks *et al.* 1972) that social class backgrounds are the major determinant of educational outcomes had been overturned. This conclusion would be premature however: recent school effectiveness findings still point to schools having an independent effect of only 8-15% on student outcomes (Reynolds and Packer 1992). But over the last twenty years the broader

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[1]Ron Edmonds, a founder of the effective schools movement, went as far as to argue '...repudiation of the social science notion that family background is the principal cause of pupil acquisition of basic school skills is probably prerequisite to successful reform of public schools for the children of the poor.' (1979: 23).

concerns about the effects of social class on student achievement raised by Coleman and Jencks have been marginalised by a pragmatic emphasis on the much smaller difference schools *can* make (Angus 1993). So, while policy makers and school reform writers may be aware of the influence of social class on student outcomes, they instead place faith in formal school management, curricula and assessment reforms to bring about changes to student performance.

There are often, nevertheless, two concessions made to the impact of social class on school performance. One is to accept that there are considerable disparities in material and staffing resources between schools related to their SES composition which may require compensatory policies if low SES schools are to be effective. A second concession to social class is that schools, even if equally resourced, are often thought to hold equal potential only in a 'value-added' sense, after all the effects attributable to student backgrounds are taken into account. Yet this concept is arguably not well understood despite attempts by quantitative researchers to explain its complexities (McPherson 1992). In particular, value-added is probably often thought to only take account of the effects of students individual backgrounds on their achievement.

But there has also been an enduring debate in quantitative school effectiveness literature over the existence of a lesser-known contextual or group effect of the SES composition of school intakes on student achievement - a 'school mix' effect (Thrupp 1995). I recently completed a comparative ethnography of four schools of varying socio-economic composition in Wellington, New Zealand which explores the complex issues represented by this debate (Thrupp 1996). In this paper I shall draw on this study to suggest that school mix impacts on school organisational and management processes[2] so as to drag down the academic effectiveness of schools in low SES settings and boost it in middle class settings. This argument, if correct, has important implications. It suggests that schools with differing SES intake compositions will, in fact, not be able to carry out similarly effective school policies and practices even with similar levels of resourcing and after taking account of individual student backgrounds. This is because school processes may have less independence from their social context - and thus the 'school effect' may be even smaller - than is typically thought at present. This in turn raises serious questions about the viability of much recent school reform.

I shall begin by noting a central limitation in previous quantitative research on the effects of school mix and how the Wellington study was designed to address this. Evidence of organisational and management processes being influenced by school mix is then discussed, focussing on daily routines, curriculum management and guidance and discipline. The last part of the paper provides a framework for explaining why school mix might influence school organisation and management and suggests implications of the findings for research and policy.

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[2]By this I generally mean processes which support the school curriculum but not as directly as classroom instruction. Such processes might variously include, for example, the work schools do when addressing truancy, disciplining students, deciding on course offerings, maintaining buildings and resources, recruiting staff etc.

The limits of previous research

In an earlier article (Thrupp 1995), I reviewed research into the impact of school mix on student achievement since the 1960s. I concluded that research in this area has been so coloured by political, ideological and methodological issues that it is hard to establish what influence, if any, school mix might have on student performance. Despite the use of powerful statistical models in recent studies, the question of school mix remains very much unresolved. The existence of a significant school mix effect is supported to varying degrees by a number of researchers including Heath and Blakey (1992), Harker and Nash (1995), Lauder and Hughes (1990), McPherson and Willms (1987), Patterson (1991) and Willms (1992). Willms, for example, suggests

> the composition of a schools intake can have a substantial effect on pupils' outcomes over and above the effects associated with pupils' individual ability and social class (1992: 41).

However some researchers have found no evidence of a school mix effect. For instance, following a recent study of Lancashire schools, Thomas and Mortimore (1994) claim that when 'rich and wide-ranging data' on prior achievement is available at the pupil level, contextual effects disappear. Mortimore *et al.* (1994) acknowledge that recent findings contradict each other and describe the effects of school mix as one of a number of 'unresolved issues' in school effectiveness research.

Although interesting, debate over the significance or otherwise of school mix is in any case rather hollow because researchers haven't investigated how it might work. In a sense, this is surprising because there are stubborn causal issues involved in quantitative research into the effects of school mix which mean that qualitative research into possible causal mechanisms might be seen as a more fruitful way forward (Thrupp 1995). But in a field long dominated by large-scale quantitative methodologies it seems that researchers haved ignored the potential of more detailed, qualitative research. A number of school effectiveness researchers have called for qualitative research into the effects of school mix (Campbell and Alexander 1965, Erbring and Young 1979, Clifford and Heath 1984, Willms 1985, Mortimore *et al.* 1994) but none have actually done any. Consequently, as McPherson and Willms (1987: 23) note, the question of how school mix affects the educational performance of individual students is 'not well understood'.

Research more closely related to the question of the impact of school mix on school processes (rather than student outcomes) has been carried out by U.S. 'sensitivity to context' researchers (Hallinger and Murphy 1986, Teddlie *et al.* 1989, Teddlie and Stringfield 1993). These researchers have demonstrated that for the most part high and low SES schools have quite different effectiveness correlates. Their findings contradict the earlier school effectiveness assumption that effectiveness 'recipes' are generalisable across all schools regardless of their socio-economic composition and render problematic the notion that school effectiveness can be theorised independently of its social context. Hallinger and Murphy (1986: 347) found for instance that

> High and low SES effective schools (are) characterised by different patterns of curricular breadth, time allocation, goal emphasis, instructional leadership, opportunities for student reward, expectations for student achievement and home-school relations.

Nevertheless this work also suffers from the limitation that it is better at suggesting the influence of school mix than explaining it. For instance Evans and Teddlie (1995) report a finding that effective low SES schools have 'initiating' principals (concerned with reform) whereas effective middle SES schools have 'managerial' principals (concerned with the maintenance of the status quo). However they cannot explain this quantitative finding and ask:

> Why is it that initiators are very common in effective low SES schools but much less so in effective middle SES schools? Do they violate norms of teacher autonomy at the middle SES schools? Does the community find their approach overbearing? (p. 18).

They call for 'rich qualitative answers' to this sort of question: this is what the Wellington study attempts to provide. I spent a year collecting data across the four schools during which, amongst other activities, I had 60 semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, and senior staff and attended numerous meetings and school events. As a result of this kind of approach - and while unable to be conclusive - the Wellington study provides fresh evidence to support the thesis that school mix does have an important effect on school processes.

The Wellington study

The Wellington study was designed to explore a range of possible causal mechanisms through which school mix might have an effect on student achievement. The full methodology is described elsewhere (Thrupp 1996). What is of most relevance here is that part of the study involved looking for and comparing evidence across four schools of how school mix might influence various organisational and management processes in such a way as to conceivably lead to the higher academic outcomes in middle class schools suggested by quantitative studies which have 'found' a school mix effect.

Many forms of data collection were used to gain a broad view of organisational and management processes across the schools. These included extensive ethnographic observations as well as semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, Head of Departments (HODs), Deans, Guidance Counsellors and members of each school's senior management teams - the Assistant Principal (AP), Deputy Principal (DP) and Principal. Information was also collected by perusing school policy statements, financial records, meeting minutes, student records, timetables, detention books, absence registers, student reports, referral slips, newsletters, student magazines and staff handbooks.

The schools selected for the study were chosen to represent a range of SES compositions. It was not enough however to study schools with different mixes only because to do so would leave substantially unanswered the central issue of

whether school policies and practices are influenced by mix or independent of it. To investigate this required a sample of schools with both different and similar SES compositions (Table 1).[3] Of the schools selected for the study, Tui College was a predominantly working class and ethnically diverse school with large numbers of Maori and Pacific Island students. Wakefield, Victoria and Plimmer colleges were all predominantly white middle class schools with Wakefield and Victoria colleges having very similar SES intakes and Plimmer College having a slightly higher mean SES. It is useful to note at the outset that while there were resource disparities between these schools, they were not dramatic. They were nowhere near as inequitable, for example, as the picture painted in *Savage Inequalities* (Kozol 1991). While Tui College collected lower funding from non-government sources, the school was similarly resourced in terms of 'basics' such as buildings and textbook allocations. Financial disparities were mainly making a difference at the level of 'extras' such as computers and musical instruments. Similarly, the staffing ratios at the schools were not very different.

Table 1: Features of the Wellington Schools: SES, Ethnicity, Size

	School SES				Ethnicity (%)			
School:	% Low	%Mid	%High	Mean	Pakeha	Maori	Pacific Island	No. of students
Tui	44	51	5	4.62	40	39	20	550
Wakefield	11	68	21	2.92	76	12	3	600
Victoria	11	66	23	2.97	81	7	5	950
Plimmer	6	57	37	2.63	85	9	1	700

Although only sometimes apparent here, a nested approach was used to structure the collection, analysis and presentation of data (after Barr and Dreeben 1983). Unusual in qualitative research, a nested approach - the idea that schools have effects at hierarchical levels such as peer and learning groups, teaching classes departments and schools as a whole - was used in this study because it was able to bring together data at different levels of each school to indicate patterns across each school. The key issue was whether evidence existed at different levels and whether it mostly pointed in similar rather that in conflicting directions. For example, if a common approach to curricula was found across classrooms, departments and a school as a whole, this would speak more powerfully to the impact of school mix than if substantially different curricula approaches were discovered at various levels within a school.

Organising and managing the schools

We shall see that at Tui College, the lowest SES school, the staff and management team found it difficult to translate many school policies into practice in any

[3]The figures here represent all students from Forms 3-6 in each of the schools in 1993, the year prior to the fieldwork. SES data were collected from school records and electoral rolls and coded using the Elley-Irving scale (Elley and Irving 1985). Here low SES, middle SES and high SES equate to Elley-Irving's 6 & 5, 4 & 3 and 2 & 1 respectively. School size has been rounded to the nearest 50 students. See Waslander *et al.* (1994) pp. 3-9 for further details.

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sustained way. It was clear that the nature of Tui College's intake made many school policies extraordinarily difficult to implement:

> Tui DP: This school is, the analogy I use is, do you know about Sisyphus' rock that he rolls up the hill? It's in *The Odyssey* somewhere. This school is like that, it makes it hard to teach here. As soon as you take your shoulder off something it goes backwards. You don't ever get to the stage here where you can say that it is in place. It's because the value system you are pushing doesn't sit naturally with the kids - you are trying to impose those values on them ... Almost anything you put in place, as soon as you stop monitoring it, reviewing it, putting the pressure on, it falls away.

By comparison, organising and managing the middle class schools was relatively straightforward because they were cushioned by the academic and social characteristics of their students:

> Victoria DP: (This is) one of the luckiest schools in the country ... in that because it serves a largely white, middle class community, the intake is a good intake in the sense that the reading age, the comprehension age, the ability of the students academically, gives us a group of students who are going to get School Certificate three years later. Our intake tells us 78% will get School Certificate and three years later that's what happens.
>
> Plimmer AP: I think that socially they are probably a bit more advanced, they seem a year or two older than at (last lower SES school) but that is just the whole socio-economic deal. If you live in (a nearby high SES suburb) and are having dinner parties and soirees, I suppose you do have all these social skills that other kids are not exposed to. And I think because of that there is a flexibility about the place here, I mean that in a good way...

In this section I look first at Tui College's struggle to maintain daily routines involving students and contrast this with the ease with which the staff at the middle class schools carried out the same tasks. Second, curriculum management is discussed to show how school mix created constraints and possibilities in this area. Finally, I also examine how pastoral efforts with students drew heavily on the resources of the staff and management team at Tui College whereas this was less of an issue at the middle class schools.

Due to space limitations what is presented is often 'too tidy': readers should view it as a 'for the most part' discussion. Related to this, I shall contrast policies and practices at Tui College with those of the middle class schools (Victoria, Wakefield, Plimmer) which will generally be treated as a group. I am not suggesting however that the middle class schools were entirely similar: indeed there were some important differences which are noted in places. Nevertheless it is essential to keep these variations in perspective: the schools were much the same when compared to the scale of their differences to Tui College.

Daily routines at Tui College

I begin by describing some daily routines at Tui College and the middle class schools. Truancy, the collection of homework and assessed student work, student meetings and events, and the collection of exam fees all provide useful points of comparison.

At Tui College monitoring and addressing truancy was a constant problem. For years the school had experienced high levels of truancy despite numerous attempts to address the situation. Shortly before I arrived at the school a group of staff had produced a 15 page report recommending a comprehensive system of checks with a part-time truancy officer employed (at the school's expense) to ring students' homes. This system was carefully implemented at the beginning of the following school year. A newsletter to parents sternly advised that it was a legal offence to keep students home and gave a reminder about a recent police sweep of the local suburb to pick up truanting students.

Attendance records suggested the level of absenteeism did drop initially (although it should be noted that the weather over the same period was exceptionally good which may have also had an effect). Before long however truancy was once again back to its previous levels. Some of those who designed the system blamed teachers:

> Teacher: More and more kids have gone back to their old ways. The systems we put in place just don't get followed. Teachers aren't doing what they are supposed to be doing.

Certainly some teachers who had originally opposed the system as unworkable may not have been supporting the initiative. Discussion at a staff meeting indicated that in some cases form teachers had accumulated absence printouts for students who had been absent for weeks but not done anything about them. Yet observations suggested other reasons why teachers may not have been undertaking their absence responsibilities adequately.

To begin with, large numbers of students were often absent from daily form time so that their absences could not be checked. Often half a class or more were either absent from school altogether, drifted in late, or left early to go to some other activity. (As we shall see shortly, other teachers also often called for the students during form time for meetings of all kinds because the students wouldn't turn up at intervals and lunchtimes). Moreover staff were also often preoccupied with organising other administrative, teaching or extracurricular activities during their own form time. In some form meetings I observed such a stream of students from other classes to see form teachers that they gave their own form classes little attention.

Attempts to catch up with absences were also not easy: they were time-consuming, unrewarding and risked confrontation. Teachers often had six to eight students to see about absences in each form time. There seemed to something of a game played between teachers and students in most of the form classes I observed. The game - 'Don't hassle me and I won't hassle you' - had

several versions. One was for students to pretend not to (or perhaps really not?) understand the absence system despite having had it explained numerous times. Another version was for students to appear concerned but baffled by absences so that the teacher might let them off:

> Student: I think that's when we had our Economics trip.
> Teacher: OK, we will forget about that one.

A third version was to offer to bring a note tomorrow so that the teacher could put off the confrontation for another day:

> Student: I don't have a note, Miss.
> Teacher: That was two weeks ago, can I have one tomorrow?
> Student: Yep.

A further version was to accept notes for absences even when it was thought that the student had been truant:

> Teacher: A note is a cure-all in this school ... 'Where were you?', 'Oh, I had to do something', 'What did you have to do?', 'I'll bring a note'... Then we say 'Ok it's covered'. We don't address the fact that it may well be covered but it's still not good enough.

> Student: You put a signature in the back of your book and show it to your form teacher and (you) are able to get away with it.

Similar kinds of patterns can be seen with the problems of collecting in homework and internal assessment work. The principal personally led a homework initiative by visiting classes to conduct a survey about how much homework was being set and to stress that it was important:

> Principal: Please get out your homework notebook and write this down. 'For the next two weeks, one, record all homework given even if you have already finished it, two, record the time it actually takes you' ... This will help us to ensure that your homework programme is balanced and that you are getting a good deal. I have to tell you that homework is very important and that we can't possibly get you up to scratch for exams if you don't do it.

The survey indicated that insufficient homework was being set and completed and led to the development of a weekly homework timetable for all junior classes which allocated an hour of homework for each subject every week. Yet despite this attempt by the school to structure homework it was apparent that homework was not being regularly set or checked by many teachers. Like the truancy system, some teachers may have undermined the homework initiative, believing it pointless:

> Teacher: It's a waste of time. It probably might push some a bit but those who want to do homework will, those who don't, won't.

Others were putting a lot of energy into 'holding the line' on homework. But the majority of teachers observed appeared to be taking the same low-confrontation approach as over checking attendance. Homework was set, but if it wasn't done by most students, staff didn't make a fuss. In several classes collecting homework was left to the end of the lesson where it was less of an issue if only one or two students handed it in on their way out the door. Others operated an elastic deadline where it could always be handed in tomorrow.

It might of course be argued that the teachers were simply not trying hard enough. Yet such an assessment does not take into account the fact that *most* students were not complying:

> Teacher: A major issue is the whole attitude thing, handing work in, completing homework. If you really wanted to hammer a class here about homework, you would spend your whole time hammering your class about homework. Whereas at (a nearby middle class school) you are picking off one or two or three in a class.

In other areas the senior management team itself was apparently sanctioning a 'flexible' approach. The late work policy for internally assessed work was one of these. The problem here was that many students, seniors in this case, did not hand their work on time:

> Teacher: Lots of kids in (a fifth form class) haven't handed in their internally assessed work - about 20% just haven't done it at all. At (a nearby middle class school) you get one or two, they are normally the kids along for the ride, you tolerate that. Here you have a lot more of those kids as well as those who can't be bothered.

The school had therefore developed a generous late work policy which was attempting to ensure that there were sanctions to encourage students to get the required work in (20% off per day), but which also gave students some credit for work done (a residual mark) if they didn't meet the deadline. Some teachers were scathing about this policy which they saw as symptomatic of the school's over-lenient approach to many issues:

> Teacher: We tend to accept second best, whether it is the white liberal thing I don't know, we tend to sort of think that because some of our kids have a bleak sort of existence outside of school, we make too many compensations. We have a ridiculous late work policy in this school ... I find it quite patronising 'cos we are saying to the kids 'you can't do it so we will change the rules for you'. But that's not how it will be when they leave school.

Another area of student non-compliance sanctioned by the school was the use of class and form time for meetings and practices that in most schools would be held at interval, lunchtime or after school. At Tui College it was difficult to arrange school meetings of any kind - sporting, cultural, pastoral or disciplinary - between staff and students outside of lessons as students would simply not turn up:

Teacher: They have a very relaxed attitude. When I managed sports teams I never got a full turnout. Even when it was important information like telling them what teams they were in there's a very relaxed turn up when you can and if you want to. That really gets to me. You spend an awful lot of time chasing around after students to get messages across.

Teacher: Unlike (a middle class school) where the kids actually do turn up, here they just don't - 'you find me'.

As a result, teachers often took students out of regular classes or form time when they could find them. In doing so they were forced to leave both their own class if they were teaching and disrupt the class the student was in. The same difficulty meant last minute panics about preparation for school events and resulted in widespread disruption to classes:

DP: Again it's that cultural capital thing. For kids going to a middle class school if you are going to be in a sports team or a choir, that's going to be extracurricular and you'll have to put in the time. Here that is not the case. Therefore whoever is in charge of the event invariably gets near the time and the performance level is not up to scratch. The kids won't put in the time so you have to take them out of class.

The school's Maori and Pacific Island cultural groups involved almost half the school, demanded a high level of performance, and the students participating were therefore absent from class a great deal. For instance, students were taken out of class to practice for two full days prior to a multicultural festival. The major drama production also required three full days of practice in school time prior to the event. These kinds of interruptions inevitably generated resentment amongst teachers:

Teacher: What we do is end up making compromises all the time. Like we put on a great multicultural concert but I've got kids who missed six periods of my class. Next term with the senior production the same thing will happen again and when there is a volleyball trip. It's OK in schools where if the kid misses six periods you know that he or she will catch up, but our kids won't.

The problem of collecting fees to allow students to sit examinations is a final example of the extraordinary effort required to carry out many ordinary tasks at Tui College. The exam fees saga began by sending reminder notices home several months in advance to warn parents and students this cost would be coming up. About two weeks before the fees were due, the teacher in charge started his campaign. He began by imploring the form teachers in staff meeting to get in behind the effort to get the money from students in their form classes:

Teacher: The next two weeks will be horrendous ... point out to (the students) that it's not a school-based fee, it has to be paid if they are going to sit their exam ...

He had prepared brightly-coloured posters which were pasted up throughout the school. He spoke to a full school assembly:

> Teacher: You have had about three months notice that we are collecting fees. You have had lots of warning. That money must now be paid. We have given you as much warning as we can. You have had time to organise and plan to get that money in. The time has come now where we need some action.

Despite these efforts only a quarter of fees had been collected by the week before deadline. As added incentive for staff to chase up the fees, the teacher started a 'league table' on the staffroom noticeboard showing the number of students yet to pay in each form class. Some teachers had not collected in any fees, most hardly any and only one or two had collected most of the fees. The daily exhortations to staff continued. A special senior assembly was held. Two days before the final deadline the teacher wrote on the staff blackboard 'When push comes to shove - Exam Fees!'. On the day the fees were due 56% students had yet to pay. The teacher in charge announced to staff wryly, 'Thanks, keep pushing, we might get it all in by a week after it is due. Today is the last day we have given the kids, we have until next (week) then we have to pull the plug'.

The final deadline having passed, the campaign went into overdrive. Reminder notices were given to individuals. Form teachers were instructed to ring or visit the students' homes. Another special assembly was called where the names of students who had not yet paid were read out. Two days before the fees were absolutely required, the teacher wrote 'PANIC' above the staffroom fees progress chart. Individuals were counselled and special arrangements were made for 'time payment' for 20% of students. Eventually all fees were accounted for and the cheque sent off on time. '100% FEES TAKE!' exclaimed a message on the staffroom noticeboard.

Daily Routines at the Middle Class Schools

By comparison, implementing and maintaining basic routines was much easier at all of the middle class schools. Truancy was typically of little concern:

> Plimmer Principal: It's not the big heavy truancy stuff you get in (a local low SES area) where you have kids away for days and days and days and parents keeping them home to babysit younger kids, that's almost unheard of. It's more the seventh form taking a spell off now and then.

Absences at these schools tended to also be monitored lesson by lesson but there were fewer checks than at Tui College. Despite this, the rate of rate of absenteeism in the observed classes at all of the middle class schools was about half that at Tui College (Table 2). The small amount of truancy which did come to light was taken seriously and invariably followed up.

Table 2: Mean Number of Days Absent in the Schools by Observed Classes (1994 school year)

TUI		WAKEFIELD		VICTORIA		PLIMMER	
3T1	3T2	3W1	3W2	3V1	3V2	3P1	301
31.9	32.1	16.2	16.3	15.5	19.5	18.0	18.1

Homework was set in most classes at the middle class schools. There was some evidence of debate about whether homework was worthwhile or not, and not all teachers insisted on its completion, but many were able to enforce more or less full compliance using the threat of detention. Whatever a teacher's personal views, homework was essentially worthwhile for teachers to set because it was expected by many students and could be capably done by most. I saw no instances where, having been given a firm deadline, most of a class at any of these schools had not done or at least attempted to do, their homework:

> Victoria Principal: We can set homework and expect that it will be done, at least by a significant number of our kids.

For subject teachers at the middle class schools, checking homework was therefore more a matter of picking out the few students who hadn't done the work, than an overall problem. It was common practice for teachers to check it in class while students were working silently so they could hear the comments of the teacher 'doing the rounds':

> Wakefield Teacher: Has anyone else not done or attempted their homework so I don't crucify * on his own?

In a similar way all of these schools were able to get away with more demanding policies on assessed work than was the case at Tui College At Victoria and Plimmer Colleges, for instance, the policy was 25% off the first day late, 50% off the second day late and a nil mark by the third day. Even if they could no longer get any marks because of lateness, students were still required to hand the work in to meet course completion requirements. Discussion with teachers suggested that most internally assessed work came in on time. As one teacher pointed out, this may have been less a matter of conscious self-interest than of general conscientiousness:

> Wakefield Teacher: At the same time, you ask the kids why they work hard and they wouldn't have a clue. They'll work their butts off but they are not at all, what's the word, clinical. If you gave them a piece of work for homework and went to one class and said 'this is worth 25% of your internal assessment mark' and to another and said 'I want to you to do this for homework' they would go home and spend equal time on it. That's the kind of kids they are.

At Wakefield and Victoria Colleges extracurricular activities tended to be held outside of class time. It was unusual for students to be allowed out of class to

either practice for or watch student performances and such interruptions were strongly resisted by the staff:

> Victoria Principal: They are a matter of concern to a lot of staff, mainly for the teaching staff who find that they can't get on with their work. When you have this expectation of the academic side of the school, things that stuff it up get teachers annoyed ... we have minimal (sports exchanges). But teachers want to get on with the job.

However the other side of the coin was that students at these school would attend out of class. There was a high level of student attendance at meetings even when held early in the morning before school or, for major events, during the holidays. Large organisational tasks such as collecting seasonal sports fees were able to be done out of classtime. It was also uncommon for students to avoid disciplinary meetings:

> Victoria Dean: They turn up, there is no problem. It's a question of how far you get beyond that.

Things were different at Plimmer College where traditionally a huge number of extracurricular offerings were organised and announced to staff at short notice. However the Principal claimed that interruptions didn't affect Plimmer College students much as they could learn as well on their own:

> Principal: Yes, there are a lot (of interruptions) and no, they don't worry me ... it must be up to the kids to catch up and if the teachers are organising effective study programmes, it should be ok ... I think given access to the material, the students will learn it anyway with the occasional question of the teacher ... In fact, it could be argued that (other activities) enhance their performance by giving them more variety.

Lastly, the collection of exam fees was relatively straightforward at all of the middle class schools:

> Victoria AP: We try and fix one day because there is such a lot of money involved. We like to do it on one day and get it processed and out of the school as quickly as possible.

In this school on the allocated day, 84% of students paid their exam fees at the school office. The next day, the total was up to 91%. At Wakefield 66% of fees came in on the two days allocated to collect them and 93% of fees were collected by the day the school had advertised as the last date for payment. Some 80% of Plimmer students had paid by the school deadline. In each school there was only a small number of students who had not paid by the due date. It was undoubtably time-consuming for staff to follow up these individual cases but there was no sense here of the campaign observed at Tui College.

Curriculum Management at Tui College

At Tui College traditional subject departments were weak because they were seen as largely irrelevant. So many students here had severe learning difficulties that curriculum issues more often came to the fore in the context of addressing massive disaffection and learning failure across the school, rather than in particular subject areas.[4] As a result, the idea that Tui College teachers had to be generalists was widely accepted:

> Principal: We have .... said quite strongly, and for positive reasons, that teachers are generalists first and (subject) specialists second. When you are dealing with the kids in this community, the bottom line is, what do we have to do to increase the life chances of these kids? That's all to do with qualifications and achievement. But there are a whole lot of preconditions and without understanding the context you are working in you won't even get to the starting point.

The view of teachers as generalists was driven home by the planned reorganisation of the school into 'faculties' of several formerly discrete departments.[5] It was also reflected in strong support for those who were seen to have cross-curricular solutions to dealing with students - those running the host of special programmes, committees and action groups the school had developed to address learning issues and provide alternatives to the academic curriculum.

First, there were large programmes aimed at helping the lowest ability students cope at school, such as the Special Care and Special Needs departments. These worked with identified (and funded) students and also tried to give support to the many other students across the school who were seriously struggling. There were simply too many students to see on a one-to-one basis, so Tui College had a policy of supporting students in ordinary classrooms rather than withdrawing them individually or in groups for remedial work. In the absence of sufficient staffing to meet demand, there was considerable tension between giving support to students in need across the school and giving enough support to the most critical cases.

Beyond the Special Care and Special Needs departments, a second set of programmes and initiatives was also aimed at the bulk of students for whom extra government funding was not available, but whose lack of prior attainment nevertheless presented an enormous challenge. A Literacy Committee met regularly to promote reading programmes, taped assisted reading, resource purchasing, peer tutoring, and reading assessment. An Integrated Studies programme involved English and Social Studies classes being combined under

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[4]For instance 70% of the third form intake were thought to be reading two or more years behind their chronological age.

[5]Anecdotal evidence suggests this reorganisation by faculties has become common in low SES schools around the country. Although usually couched in term of a more co-ordinated response to the Essential Learning Areas of the NZ curriculum, this kind of reorganisation is clearly also a useful response at a time when the rolls of low SES schools are falling and many formerly large departments have become too small to sustain a middle management position.

one teacher. The aim of this was primarily to allow more time for diagnosing and addressing learning and pastoral problems.

A third set of programmes was aimed at meeting the cultural needs of the main non-Pakeha groups within the school. The school had a large Maori bilingual programme and a supporting bilingual/bicultural development 'action team' and parent group. There was also a Taha Maori programme for other students across the school and an 'action team' of Pacific Island teachers and parents which was examining educational issues for Pacific Island students.

Lastly, there was a large vocational Transition programme because most students in the senior school didn't want to take many academic courses. Almost half the senior curriculum was made up of Transition classes with many taking Transition subjects over two or three lines of the timetable (eight to twelve hours a week). In addition the school offered large numbers of short courses in conjection with the local polytechnic.

Tui College was justifiably proud of the strength of these various programmes. It claimed that its 'least able students were very well served' and many of the staff were also very positive about the way the school was addressing bi-cultural and multi-cultural issues. However it was clear that these programmes took up much energy and that, in general, staff were too caught up in dealing with the mass of low prior achievement students to give the advancement of its smaller groups of 'average' and 'able' students much thought. Staff ambivalence (if not hostility) to addressing the needs of these students when the great majority of students clearly had far more pressing needs became apparent when a programme for 'able students' was proposed at Tui College. There was general support from teachers for the programme as a means to 'help bring up the standard for everyone' but this was tempered by concern about taking resources from programmes for the more numerous 'less able'. For instance:

> Shouldn't compromise programme for less able students. It's an add on, not an alternative.
>
> Needs to be marketed to the community. If the emphasis is placed here, some of the community may be put off sending their students here - elitism.
>
> Extra tuition at the expense of other curriculum?
>
> 'Disabled' programme should not be compromised in order to put this in place.

In the event the school did start to set up an 'able students' programme but the team charged with setting up the programme expressed reservations that the idea would not take off because staff were already too busy and, in general, not very interested:

> Teacher: I suppose your middle and your bright kids are expected to get on with it ... it's an issue of staff time, they haven't got the time or energy to

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give up X number of hours to help a relatively small number of kids, they have basically got their hands full.

The tension between providing an academic curriculum and catering for students with low levels of prior achievement can also be seen in the senior curriculum where widespread academic failure generated many organisational problems. As only a few students passed School Certificate, most were unlikely to cope with more senior levels of study. However in order to have enough students to retain viable senior classes, prerequisites for entry to those classes were kept low. The result was that these classes were frequently full of students for whom the level of work was too advanced. Another effect of exam failure on a grand scale was that instead of doing a full academic course at senior level, most students adopted a smorgasbord approach to the curriculum, taking mostly non-academic Transition type subjects as well as picking one or two academic courses in which they might be successful. These perceived 'easier' exam subjects went in and out of student favour from year to year, making curriculum planning difficult.

Tui College was attempting to respond to this problem by rationalising its senior academic offerings and strengthening prerequisites to get students to repeat failed subjects. This suggests some concern with maintaining a viable academic curriculum, at least at the most senior levels. However many teachers were opposed to tightening up the academic curriculum. The main concern was that 'non-academic' students would be left without enough options:

> Teacher: They haven't considered properly the implications of tightening up the criteria for entry into senior subjects - there will be the 20 students who can do it, and the rest. We are not yet catering adequately for most students in non-academic subjects.

Curriculum Management at the Middle Class Schools

In contrast to Tui College, it was academic success that was considered paramount at the middle class schools. Here most students took academic subject options. The criteria for entry into senior courses was strict in order to preserve their academic tone. The academic emphasis was invariably seen to come from their predominantly middle class intakes:

> Victoria Principal: Well in large measure it comes back simply to the choices that students want. I mean students here have absolute freedom to choose the courses they want ... when you see the subjects they take, I mean for a school this size to have (so many) seventh form Maths with Statistics, and Maths with Calculus classes gives you an indication of where people put their priorities. You don't need to talk to them, it's very clear ...
>
> Most parents at these schools took a keen interest in the academic progress of their children. Parents asked for special reports on their child's progress and complained forcefully about lack of homework, other students disrupting their child's lessons or perceived teacher incompetence. An indicator of parental interest was the strength of report night attendance:

Victoria Dean: Most come, especially if the form teacher sells it well. There are usually only a couple of kids in each class whose parents don't turn up.

These were not schools where teachers saw themselves as generalists. Subject departments were a key organisational structure of all of the middle class schools. There was competition between departments for high examination results:

Wakefield HOD: If a department does well in exams it is seen as a good department.

The middle class schools all had extension programmes which were well supported by staff. Dissent on the grounds of equity for students as was seen at Tui College was rare. On the other hand, courses and programmes for students who were less academic or struggling were very limited compared to Tui College. These schools also had Special Needs departments but they were small and often geared towards the problems of 'average' and 'able' students as much as those with low levels of prior attainment. Plimmer College's Special Needs department offered short courses to all students on exam techniques, goal setting, 'mind mapping', time management and motivation. Wakefield College had a large Enlish as a Second Language programme but it was mostly targeted towards wealthy Asian fee-paying students. All of the middle class schools had transition programmes but they were relatively small and constantly marginalised by the academic emphases of their schools:

Victoria Teacher: The community drives the school towards academics, the staff have bought into that, it's like barrowing cement up hill to (get transition classes established). The 'tail' is not attended to.

Overall there can be little doubt that the main curriculum focus of the middle class schools was towards those students who could succeed in external exams and uphold the academic reputations of their schools:

Wakefield HOD: I mean at (a low SES school) the fact that 25% of kids in your class couldn't read meant that if you ignored them it was at your peril - literally! Whereas (here) it is easier not to be forced to cater for that small group at the bottom. The expectations of parents here ... the brighter ones have more say, the brighter kids are the saving grace of the school so you cater for them. They probably have an undue influence though.

Guidance and Discipline at Tui College

Guidance and disciplinary matters, often with a care and protection dimension, were the most pressing problem facing the staff and management at Tui College:

MPT: What are the issues that create problems for you in running the school?
Principal: Let's just take today, never mind the long term view. Look in terms of the suspensions we have had to do this year. I've just written a report to the board listing the 18 suspensions we have done (over the first part of) this year....

AP: We have problem after problem after problem of the sort that are way beyond our skills to have any impact on. I'm talking about kids from dysfunctional families who by the age of 13 or 14 are involved in truancy and crime ... So that's the big one for me, manifested in lots of ways, the kids who truant, the kids who go off their heads in the classroom, the kids who are depressed.

There appeared to be about 30-40 students at any one time, mostly 3rd and 4th formers, who were of major concern to the school's guidance network:

AP: There are probably 10 kids who are so far out of control we can do nothing to fix it and their families can't either. Then there are a second raft of kids who are (also) serious...there is about 20-30 of them.

Examples volunteered by the Tui College senior management team suggested the scale of the demands presented by these students and, in the absence of adequate help from outside agencies, the impotence they felt in the face of those demands:

DP: Let's take Student A, who one month pinches some stuff in a pretty organised fashion, is suspended, comes back and in the space of two weeks manages to systematically rob two other staff members, their wallets, keys and so on. A practiced criminal. Or Student B, a girl who is totally out of control at home, sleeps rough in (the city), heavily into crime, Mum's been arrested, she's got a drug and alcohol problem, a father who is trying to claim custody but there's some sexual abuse history in the background, that sort of situation. That student, suspended for violence, back in school, picked up smoking hash. What do we do with that kid? There have been meetings with Social Welfare, Justice are involved but finally there is no place for that kid at school....

Not surprisingly, dealing with these cases was very time-consuming. The principal estimated that suspensions took some 30 hours to process on average including meetings with the student, parents, outside agencies and the Board of Trustees.

AP: Following through student problems takes up a lot of time. Each case takes so long because you often have to visit in person, many families aren't on the phone, you set up a meeting and people don't turn up...

Like the senior administration, the guidance counsellor was also under enormous pressure and was thought by several staff to be completely swamped. He described the scale of need as a 'bottomless pit situation' and said he had a current caseload which included about 30% of the school population. Issues were typically poverty related with many students having Social Welfare involvement. Many were the victims of physical and sexual abuse:

Guidance Counsellor: I had one horrible day where I opened the door to three girls, each with a major sexual abuse issue ...

The kind of 'social welfare' work being done by the senior management team and guidance counsellor of Tui College meant that they had less time to deal with relatively less important disciplinary and pastoral issues. These were supposed to be addressed by a devolved pastoral system of several 'Houses', each with its own head teacher. Officially there had been good reasons for developing this system,[6] but one of its unacknowledged purposes was to prevent students ending up in the Principal's office too quickly.

> MPT: Do you think that one of the reasons it (the House system) was set up was to prevent students reaching the administration too quickly?
> House Head: I don't think any one has ever said that was one of the reasons but it is one of the reasons. The House system makes things cyclical between the House Head and the form tutor. That circle might go around a bit then it goes up (to the administration). So there has been a lot of work before you get to the point where you have to boot kids out.
> MPT: So has there been any change to that?
> House Head: Not really. We are still booting kids out. But our intake has changed also so it is hard to know.

Yet, given the number of students that presented guidance and discipline problems, the senior management team would have been completely overwhelmed if Tui College had not had a comprehensive pastoral system in place. This point had not escaped some staff:

> Teacher: At (a nearby middle class school) problem children were sent up the system very quickly 'cos there were so few of them. Whereas here if they did that they would be swamped. I think the administration realises that and realises 'hey, we really need to have the staff on side with us'.

Certainly the senior management team saw their role as being only at the end of the line:

> AP: I believe we should only be the end point of the system, when all else is failed. So we are like the last stop.

The only misdemeanours which therefore warranted immediate suspension and 'last stop' administration action at Tui College were starting a fight or carrying or using drugs or alcohol. As a consequence the House Heads further down the school found themselves dealing with issues such as truancy and verbal abuse of teachers. Some resented this:

> House Head: The House Heads feel they are doing too much. They (the senior management team) pick up very little these days. Maybe a major fight where parents come in....(The senior management team) are not very receptive... it's like, don't hassle me, I've got enough hassles.

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[6]By having vertical form classes, students stayed with the same form teacher throughout their school careers so there was seen to be a better chance for form teachers to get to know and respond more quickly to the pastoral needs of students.

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It was at the level of the form teachers - 5 or 6 in each House - that most individual student problems were expected to be addressed. However few form teachers were able to deal effectively with the range of activities they were expected to pick up as they had a considerable administrative load:

> House Head: In terms of the (House) groups being self-actualising, well, it depends on the teachers in your group but the constraint is the time spent on other issues...in form time there are too many administrative tasks that need to be done, they don't have time for pastoral care.

As a result of the demands placed on the guidance and discipline system at Tui College at every level, there was little support for classroom teachers. They were generally expected to deal with their own discipline problems. However with little backup, many teachers chose to avoid addressing disciplinary issues at the expense of the learning environment of their classrooms.

> Teacher: At Tui College, (students) don't go somewhere else. It's your problem, you deal with it. So it depends how much confrontation you are prepared to buy into.

Guidance and Discipline at the Middle Class Schools

Pastoral difficulties on the scale experienced at Tui College were simply unheard of at any of the middle class schools:

> Victoria Principal: We don't have, by and large, too much by the way of behavioural problems. When I went away from (previous lower SES school) I knew I would go back to a crisis. Every day, every week. Here I can go away, come back, things are handled ... we can afford to be reasonably lax, that's not the word, we don't have to make law and order an issue, by and large.

> Plimmer AP: The kids here are very articulate and very able socially. For the most part their social skills are fairly finely honed and therefore I don't deal very much with students who say 'Oh, fuck off' to the teacher because they do it in other ways or are able to extricate themselves from those kinds of situations .... There certainly wouldn't be the same amount of stuff as I did at (a lower SES school).

Typically none of the middle class schools suspended as many students as at Tui College (Table 3). This was *not* because the middle class schools were suspending less readily: indeed suspensions were used at these schools for what were (relatively) minor offences such as smoking (cigarettes) and swearing:

> Plimmer Principal: It's an early step and it is also often the last. It's a way of saying to students 'you are pissing your teachers off, you can have some time out'. The three more serious suspensions we would have had to have done this year, the parents could see the writing on the wall and took them out (permanently) voluntarily.'

> MPT: What about a student telling a teacher to 'fuck off'?

Victoria Dean: Straight to (the DP) or (Principal). Fast track. (The Principal) is hot on that.

Table 3: Formal School Suspensions (1994 school year)

	TUI		WAKEFIELD		VICTORIA		PLIMMER	
Suspensions	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
—whole school	52	9.5	11	1.8	30	3.2	19	2.7
—third form	18	13.8	1	0.8	4	1.6	5	2.7

As a result of being under less pressure, the schools were able to use strongly hierarchical referral systems which saw the small proportion of 'problem' students identified and passed quickly to Deans and senior staff:

Wakefield Dean (in staff meeting): So if you are having any problems just blue-slip them to us.

There was little evidence that those in more senior positions were swamped with student problems as a result:

Victoria Dean: I actually see the role of the dean as supporting the teacher ... I intervene early.

Wakefield DP: Strictly speaking, by the time it gets to me it should be serious but in practice it doesn't really work that way. Kids bounce back between me and the deans and the form teachers like a fantail in a badminton match.

The main reason the middle class schools could impose strict disciplinary regimes was the support of the vast majority of students and their parents:

Wakefield Dean: The kids who stand out are very few in number so they are easy to target. If this school was in (a working class suburb) the system wouldn't cope because your workload would increase, there would have to be a different way I suppose. .... Most (parents) have a nice, white, middle class value system so they say 'righto, I'll talk to young Johnny at home'. So in lots of cases we work very closely with parents, we couldn't do our job if we didn't have their backup.... I have never been challenged yet: 'Why are you giving my kid a detention?'

Counselling at the middle class schools was an important activity but revolved around quite different issues than at Tui College:

Victoria Counsellor: There is not a lot of poverty related stuff at this school. Redundancies yes, the emotional stuff, but not a lot of poverty stuff. Not a lot of physical abuse, that has a lot to do with socio-economic levels, that goes for a lot of things ... I don't have a lot of dealings with Social Welfare.

Plimmer Counsellor: Sometimes I think we have problems of affluence. I don't deal so much with Social Welfare type issues, like (a low SES school) they have a lot of sexual and physical abuse, for us that is quite small. What we do have are breakdowns in families, kids and parents, big issues around peer groups, the need to be cool and to be popular.

Understanding the effects of school mix on school organisation and management

The Wellington study provides much qualitative evidence to link process differences to school SES composition. As the preceding discussion indicates, it seems likely that school mix has a powerful influence on what kinds of daily routines can take place in a school, the types of curricula it emphasises and its approach to pastoral issues.[7] Not discussed here, but also raised in the study, were less direct impacts of SES mix on other organisational and management concerns including staff recruitment, relations, morale and appraisal, and school marketing, governance and funding issues (Thrupp 1996). All of these were also substantially more difficult at Tui College than in the middle class schools. This theme is supported by a number of other recent studies of high and low SES schools (Bowe *et al.* 1992, Gerwitz *et al.* 1993, Gordon *et al.* 1994, Kozol 1991, Metz 1990, Proudfoot and Baker 1995, Wylie 1994).

But if school mix does have a strong influence on school processes, how can this be explained? At the most general level we can begin by looking to the organic or inter-connected relationship between schools and middle class rather than working class families (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, Connell *et al.* 1982, Lareau 1989, Metz 1990). These middle class-organic, working class-inorganic relations between home and school need to be seen played out at the school as well as the individual level. Schools develop processes which reflect their SES mix. Solidly middle class schools have strongly supportive student cultures which allow them to organise themselves as academic schools relatively smoothly. Working class schools will, in general, be quite the opposite.

The Wellington study also points to the importance of *critical mass*. Many of the organisational/management differences noted in the preceding discussion are best seen as issues of power, with the power relations between different social classes within schools being of central importance. This is because in a predominantly middle class school, the struggles of working class families and students are marginalised and can have relatively little effect on school organisation and management. As a school becomes more working class however, it can be predicted that the processes of the school will shift, despite resistance from middle class teachers and students, towards the culture of the increasingly sizeable working class group.

The Wellington study further suggests that it is because school policies and practices have to be *negotiated* with students that particular processes 'fit' working class and middle class schools. Negotiation is a term that has often been

[7]It is also worth noting that Tui College and the middle class schools were by no means at the opposite ends of the SES spectrum: had even lower and higher SES schools been included, differences in these school processes would have probably been even greater.

used by symbolic interactionalists such as Delamont (1983) and Woods (1979). Curriculum theorists have also begun to study the ways in which curriculum and pedagogy is 'embedded' in the events that students and teachers jointly construct in classes (see Doyle 1992 for a summary). However, while research in both of these fields can be useful, neither give much emphasis to social class. Here I want to link the notion of negotiation more explicitly to the social class characteristics of students. It is likely that school policies and practices of many kinds must be negotiated with students on the basis of class-related levels of compliance, motivation and 'ability'. These in turn are related to students' views of schooling and their likely occupational futures (Brown 1987, Lauder *et al.* 1992). Metz (1990: 99) makes a similar point:

> Teaching is an interactive endeavour; it requires making connection with students. If their attitudes and skills vary substantially, so must the content and style of teachers work with them. Accordingly the very nature of teacher's work varies with their students and so with the social class of the communities from which students come, even when teachers' own training or initial skills are similar.

Most policy makers and school reform writers do not take this view however. Their discussions rarely acknowledge the possibility that student characteristics might influence school practices as well as the other way around. Instead one finds an uncritical faith in the value of choice or in the ability of teachers and principals 'to make a difference'. But this is not supported by the Wellington study or earlier qualitative studies which have looked in depth at schools (e.g. Delamont 1983, Powell *et al.* 1985). For instance although it might be argued that the staff at the middle class schools had higher expectations of students and it was this that underpinned their more demanding approaches, the Wellington study suggests that the notion that school staff can raise or lower their expectations at will has limited value. Instead it should be asked where levels of expectation come from. The idea of school processes being negotiated highlights the likelihood that expectations are also context bound - they will be largely generated in response to the dominant characteristics of the student body. In this sense, staff expectations will not be so much high or low as appropriate or inappropriate.

If school mix does underpin many school processes then we might expect it to help to explain school characteristics found by other studies. For instance this study provides an answer to the question posed earlier in this paper by Evans and Teddlie (1995) about why effective low SES schools have 'initiating' principals whereas effective middle SES schools have 'managerial' principals. There is, in general, relatively little to change at most middle class schools - they are seen to 'work' by students, staff and parents alike. What value would a reforming principal have here? At working class schools on the other hand, problems are more substantial. Reformers are more welcome/needed in the context of a continuing search for solutions.[8] Furthermore, whereas a principal of a middle class school can delegate successfully, a more 'hands on' approach seems less a

[8]Indeed it may be argued that most educational innovation is found in working class schools precisely because of this search for solutions.

matter of choice than necessity in working class schools in order to carry policies through in the context of myriad and incessant daily demands:

> Tui Principal: I'd like to think you don't need to be (as directly involved), that I could go somewhere else and be a different sort of principal because a lot of the 'hands on' drive would not be necessary. It would come from the community and from the teachers who would have that much more time to have more wide ranging thoughts and projects themselves. I think it is hell of a hard here to get your mind on the broad canvas when you are locked into the day to day.

Another example of how school mix can help to explain school policy and practice characteristics is the way the pastoral ideologies of the Wellington schools, developed in response to the needs of their student bodies, fits a typology of approaches to guidance and discipline suggested by Johnson *et al.* (1994). Tui College had large numbers of students with serious pastoral and learning needs. Staff were generally forced to recognise these issues and in this respect many took what Johnson and his colleagues would probably call a 'socially critical' orientation to pastoral issues. That is, they realised students were not simply being 'naughty', rather there was 'the impact of situational factors on student behaviour' (ibid, p.272) so it was necessary to be more flexible. By comparison, Wakefield and Victoria colleges both had fewer students with serious problems in or out of school. In most instances students were viewed by these schools as misbehaving rather than having more serious problems. They took what Johnson would probably call 'traditional' approaches to school discipline. With strong parental support, they were able to be relatively intolerant of student non-compliance and sustain strongly hierarchical disciplinary systems. Finally, at Plimmer College students were counselled to take responsibility for their own behaviour in a way that was perhaps closest to Johnson's 'liberal progressive' orientation to school discipline. This highly individualised approach was possible only because numbers of offending students were extremely small and perhaps also because staff were often dealing with students from liberal, well-educated families who may have expected a reasoned, counselling approach rather than straight punishment.

If the argument that school mix impacts on school processes is correct, then to what degree can teachers and school leaders promote 'successful' school characteristics? It is clear that teachers and school leaders can make *some* difference. Among the middle class schools, Victoria and Wakefield colleges appeared to be schools with 'pushing' policies that were maximising their ability to make a difference over mix, whereas Plimmer College appeared to be resting largely on the characteristics of its mostly 'able' and compliant students. It seems likely that where a school has 'pushing' policies, the impact of mix will be somewhat diminished. Where this is not the case, it will be somewhat larger.

Nevertheless, the study points to school processes being fundamentally bounded by the SES mix of a school and the power relations that mix generates. It seems highly likely that many 'successful' school characteristics will only become feasible with a reasonable proportion of middle class students. On the face of it, for instance, Tui College might have been better organised and managed.

However this issue can only be properly seen in the context of the often overwhelming demands presented by its student body. The example of collecting exam fees suggests that any particular organisational or management goal might be attainable in a low SES school through effort and determination. Yet the reality is that every teacher has not just one or two but numerous such responsibilities to carry out:

> House Head: Form teachers have a lot to do and they get knocked back a lot, told off a lot. But they are being expected to, you know, check log books, check uniform, check absences, check seniors have paid their fees ...

It was a problem that senior staff at Tui College acknowledged but felt powerless to do much about because they were also overwhelmed. For, as the Tui DP who had recently had some contact with a middle class school put it:

> You can't do everything, you can't, you can't ... Our management structures are probably not as good as they should be but that probably reflects the pressure we are all constantly under. You do not get time, the school does not allow you time, to sit back and reflect. I cannot believe the people I'm meeting at (a middle class college). I cannot believe the, not laid back, but just open, friendly, unflurried way the staff relate to each other. It is extraordinary. And (that school) is working quite efficiently. But people don't have that kind of gaunt, drawn, lunatic look about them that you constantly see around here.

Policy Implications

The limitations of quasi-market 'choice' and 'self management' reforms in education have been highlighted by numerous critical analyses of the policies and their effects (e.g. Ball 1993, Gerwitz *et al.* 1995, Marginson 1993, Smyth *et al.* 1993, Walford 1994, Whitty 1996). The Wellington study adds to the picture by highlighting enduring constraints and advantages for teachers and school leaders which should make us even more cautious about the claims of school reformers. This is because it suggests that while many factors identified as contributing to achievement may indeed be school *based*, they are nonetheless not school *caused*. They relate to student's class backgrounds and will therefore not be easily modified.

Of particular concern here are aspects of reform which assume that schools are able to be equally effective irrespective of their intakes. One area of reform where school mix has not been adequately considered is school self-management. The Wellington study suggests that this will be much less likely to succeed in working class schools than middle class schools. This will be partly due to resource disparities (Gordon *et al.* 1994, Kozol 1991, Wylie 1994) as well as class-based differences in parental involvement in schools (Lareau 1989, Hannaway 1995) However the Wellington study also points to the intense pressures on teachers and school leaders generated by students in low SES schools. These should not be underestimated:

Tui AP: I just put out fires basically, try and put out little fires before they spring up as bushfires.

Tui DP: You take the standard issue of the knock on the door 'Mr *, I've just discovered so and so smoking dope in the toilet'....you are interviewing all day. Basically if there is a knock on my door at 9.30am and that sort of thing has happened, that's the day gone.

Tui Principal: The proportions of time I spend on things vary because you can be sailing along and suddenly get hit by a crisis that can absorb days of work for the senior admin. The AP and DP pick up most of that but there are times when I realise that the people pressure, the kid pressure, needs to be spread a bit so I pick up the basic pupil stuff.

As a result of these intake-related pressures, time and energy required to consider and implement demands from central agencies will be scarce in low SES schools compared to middle class settings. For instance the middle class schools in the Wellington study were giving much more attention to recent curriculum and assessment reforms. At Victoria College the demands of accreditation for the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA)[9] were being met in a systematic, orderly fashion with considerable consultation and outside 'experts' being brought into the school to help with difficult issues. At Tui College, on the other hand, the principal wrote the accreditation document during a week of his summer break. Therefore although the school was ostensibly keeping up, this was only achieved by taking shortcuts - by observing only the letter of what was required rather than the spirit. It is dubious whether this approach would have translated into any real change at the level of the classroom:

Tui Teacher: What you have is that if anyone came in from outside the school and looked at our policies, it looks really good. But when you look at staff and what's happening in classrooms and what's not happening in classrooms, no one wants to get in there and start scratching around too much because they are going to find there is lots of stuff happening that's just crap. And lots of stuff happening that is really good too. But it's all unstructured, it's not tight at all.[10]

A second assumption challenged by the Wellington study is that schools which 'lose' in educational markets are poor performers. Neo-liberals link the popularity of schools to their performance. Teachers and principals of unpopular schools are held accountable for the spiral of decline because they have not improved their schools sufficiently to boost their reputation and hence the size of their student intakes. The eventual failure of some schools can therefore be seen simply as the price to be paid for a quality education system. Chubb and Moe (1990: 33) are more frank than most about this 'natural selection' agenda:

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[9] The NZQA is the government agency responsible for setting up and implementing a standards-based national qualifications 'framework'. The accreditation process involved schools, as 'providers' of qualifications, documenting ways in which they have in place suitable systems for managing the quality of assessment.

[10] This raises doubts about methods of school evaluation - such as those used by New Zealand's Education Review Office - which focus mostly on school policies rather than actual practice.

Schools that fail to satisfy a sufficiently large clientele will go out of business. ... Of the schools that survive, those that do a better job of satisfying consumers will be more likely to prosper and proliferate.

However, in conjunction with the observation that schools in decline in the marketplace are invariably those with low SES intakes (Waslander and Thrupp 1995, Gerwitz *et al.* 1995, Whitty 1996) the findings challenge the neo-liberal account of the failure of schools because they suggest that teachers and principals at (low SES) declining schools are so overwhelmed with pastoral and learning problems that they will be unable to deliver similar academic programmes as middle class schools in any case.

Many of the extra difficulties noted at schools like Tui College could probably be overcome by additional staff to cope with student demands. Yet even this is unlikely to fully compensate for the advantages of having a middle class intake. Therefore some intervention to reduce the SES segregation of school intakes is also a necessary measure to improve the overall standard of schooling. This would have the effect of both sharing the problems of poverty more evenly around schools and moving middle class cultural and economic resources into (presently) low SES schools. However the question of how best to intervene in school markets to prevent inequality is a complex one (Adler 1993, Gerwitz *et al.* 1995, Lauder *et al.* 1995, Lawton 1992, OECD 1994, Walford 1994). Policies which could overcome middle class resistance would require a strong commitment to state intervention in education on the grounds of equity. The problem is that such commitment is unlikely from neo-liberal governments which are hostile to equity measures. As Evetts (1995: 235) notes, '(t)hose who are supporting and promoting choice polices to augment choice are simply not interested in equity as a goal or benchmark in education'.

The Wellington study also challenges many current models of evaluating the performance of schools and making them accountable. For, even when students' individual background characteristics are taken into account, schools should still not be expected to perform at the same level unless the impact of their group characteristics is also taken into account. This is quite a different perspective to that taken by New Zealand's Education Review Office (ERO) in their recent report on 'The Quality of Schooling in Mangere and Otara' (Education Review Office 1996). This report dismisses the effects of socio-economic status in one short paragraph (p.4) in order to argue that the problem there is one of teacher and school effectiveness. The report does this by making reference to supposedly exemplary low SES schools in the area. This has also been a typical approach used by effective schools research, particular in its earliest phase (e.g. Brookover *et al.* 1979). However what has been invariably left unsaid - and is in ERO's report as well - is that the supposedly higher performance of such exemplary schools is still far below what is typical in middle class settings (Thrupp, forthcoming).

In contrast to this, good policy would acknowledge not only that schools can be more or less effective, but also be realistic about ways in which the nature of intakes create important constraints and possibilities for teachers and school leaders. To assist the development of policies which better address the concerns of schools, further research is needed to ascertain what is possible for schools

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within the bounds set by particular school mixes. This would allow teachers, school leaders and policy makers to gain a more realistic, contextualised view of what the goals should be and where performance might be lifted.

Conclusion

The Wellington study has suggested some stubborn constraints on organisational and management processes in low SES schools compared to their middle class counterparts. For policy makers it raises the difficult prospect that technical solutions to raise effectiveness may not alone provide the answer to problems faced by schools. It also means that schools can not be so easily held accountable for their success or failure in the educational marketplace. However it is essential that policy makers consider the implications of school mix. As Metz (1990: 100) comments:

> To the degree that the educational reform movement sets aside class differences as unimportant, it brackets and overlooks one of the major influences on schools. It consequently relies for all of its impact on attempting to change patterns that exert much weaker influence. To ignore the most forceful influences in a situation is rarely a prescription for effective reform.

The study will not be welcomed either by the staff of OFSTED, ERO or other agencies which evaluate schools, nor indeed by those teachers and principals in low SES schools who want to believe they can be 'just as good'. Nevertheless those who work in or evaluate low SES schools need to be aware of likely constraints on their ability to bring about change. To be otherwise is a recipe for personal disillusionment and may create support for policy reforms which hinder rather than help. The work of organising and managing schools is most realistically viewed as the art of the possible.

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